

Testimony for the Appropriations Committee
Education/OEC Subcommittee Public Hearing
Connecticut General Assembly

03 March, 2015

Good Afternoon. My name is Kathy Queen, Co-Chair of the State Funded Child Development Centers Directors Forum and retiring Director of Wallingford Community Day Care Center.

The Governor's budget cuts \$808,000 that has helped to support low and moderate income working parent families with school age children. We urge you to restore that cut. Our families struggle to pay fees on a sliding scale that allow them to work and support their families. Many of the parents of our school age children have been with us for years and have younger children in those same programs. Just because the children age out of kindergarten does not mean their parents can suddenly afford the full fee for child care. Many of our families cannot access Care4Kids because they work variable schedules including nights and weekends in low paying jobs such as retail, food service, or home health. Some are juggling two or more jobs to make ends meet. They frequently have one or more younger children who are also benefitting from our programs. Please don't leave the children without subsidized care.

We also urge your support of bills that seek to find a way to maintain the quality of our NAEYC accredited programs struggling with the problem of acquiring and retaining high quality staff currently paid at levels that can only be described as "obscene." Teachers with degrees and twenty or more years of devotion to our funded programs are now paid an average of \$30,000 per year. Many have costly health insurance plans, no retirement, and no future. The community sees these professional teachers as "babysitters," yet they continue to pay for more early childhood courses, always striving to be better teachers because they care about the kids and families. We have always said "we've done so much for so little for so long, the state now expects us to do everything for nothing!" We cannot continue to add slots and move toward universal pre-kindergarten on the backs of these dedicated employees. We urge that there be NO NEW SLOTS added to any publicly funded early childhood program until we address the obvious: you must pay the teachers.

Ben Barnes, in his presentation to the Connecticut Voices for Children Budget Forum a few weeks ago noted that the state has employees that must be paid because you can't expect people to work and not pay them. Yet that is exactly what we do to our teachers. We have embraced state law that requires bachelor's degreed teachers in half of our classrooms by July 1, and all of our classrooms by July 1, 2020, yet we have done nothing to increase compensation that would make that possible. In addition, the

OEC has developed an Early Childhood Teacher Credential that severely limits the pool of applicants after July 1, 2015.

Our teachers already qualify for the low income state benefits available to our clients. We are now asking them to do more for less. Many of our teachers work two jobs so they can do what they love yet still eat and pay rent. For those with families, that job is even more difficult. Their kids are on Husky, get free and reduced lunch at school, and many live in subsidized housing. Some of the good teachers work with us for a short time after college only to find jobs in a public school system where they can benefit from our training, yet make a liveable wage. We cannot continue to do this. It is wrong to continue to ask for more and more qualifications without the compensation these professionals deserve. The cost now is astronomical because this state has refused to address this issue in a timely manner. We've been asking for years, the situation is now a crisis. You must pay if there is to be a future for Connecticut children. Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted

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Co-Chair, State Funded Child Development Centers Directors Forum